**Variability in Middle Stone Age Stone Artifact Reduction Strategies and Raw Material Use in the Karonga District of Northern Malawi**

Nightingale, Sheila (City University of New York, Graduate Center), Alex Mackay (School of Archaeology and Anthropology, Australia), Jessica Thompson (School of Social Science, University of Queensland), Victor de Moor (Department of Archaeology, Leiden University, Leiden) and Elizabeth Gomani-Chindebvu (Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife, and Culture, Lilongwe)

The variability of Middle Stone Age stone tool production has previously been demonstrated in the archaeological record of northern Malawi. However, evaluation of these assemblages in relation to those of more intensively studied parts of Africa has been minimal. This is in part because of a lack of chronological resolution and an analytical framework for typo-technological classification and comparison. From 2009 – 2012, archaeological survey and excavation of Middle Stone Age deposits in the Karonga region of Malawi has resulted in the recovery of artifacts from four different major river catchments. This dataset, which comprises worked ochre and over 40,000 stone artifacts from six sites and 21 test pits across the landscape, and detailed survey data of several hundred surface finds from the broader area, shows significant temporal and geographic variability of the artifactual record. This variability—evidenced in the differential use of raw materials and reduction strategies that vary in intensity of preparation and exploitation, both between sites and within layers at the same site—is of particular importance for understanding the adaptive responses of MSA hominins at times of inferred environmental change, and the behavioral trends that situate these hominins in relation to their contemporaries elsewhere in Africa.